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The Meanings of Words and the Categories of Things—Indian and Aristotelian

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Here will be given only a preliminary sketch of a topic which must be much further investigated; much material, relevant to the issue, must be perused before any final and decisive conclusions can be reached. Work is planned for a study of an essential concept of both Indian philosophy and grammar, namely, *padārtha*. The most important point on this occasion is that a comparative method will be applied as a start, primarily aiming at understanding of a Sanskrit term by telling from a Western point of view what the term does not mean. More generally, the aim is to meet a special challenge to the indologist, namely, to try to abolish such prejudices as are based on the constraints of words and their translations. To question whether the words, and especially the technical terms, used for ideas and abstract concepts, should be regarded as being on every occasion and for ever attached to the concepts concerned is indeed to start a very Indian kind of debate, in fact, suggesting the topic of *śabda* as *nitya* or *anitya*.

It has been a commonly accepted idea that the reasons for using the word "category" as a translational equivalent to the Sanskrit word *padārtha* cannot be questioned. My contention is instead that such a translation has obscured the understanding of *padārtha*, an important Sanskrit term which has had a prominent position in Vaiśeṣika philosophy and in grammatical tradition. The common use of the word "category" has even to a certain extent prevented a closer interpretation of this basic term in both cases.

I shall start with a short survey of Aristotle's use of the term κατηγορία, then proceed to some discussion of the word *padārtha* in certain occurrences, and finally try to reconcile these observations—or, if my aim is achieved, to distinguish between them. To be honest, the difference between the two settings was actually observed by Foucher in the expositions in his edition of *Tarkasaṁgraha*, but not conclusively.

The main source for the discussion of the term "category" in Aristotle's works is the text entitled the *Categories* (αἱ κατηγορίαι), one of his shorter logical tractates, gathered together in *Organon*. In this text, actually devoted to a discussion of the basics of the sentence, 10 enumerated items are presented and the same number recurs also in one other work by Aristotle, the *Topica*. The number 10 for the categories is not at all sacred and in other passages they are enumerated as eight or fewer. Aristotle himself returns to the notion of categories rather seldom in his texts, in his extensive works actually not more than five other times. Though the topic of "categories" is not one of Aristotle's main points, it came to be influential in European thought through the scholastics, i.e. mainly during the Middle Ages.

In order to understand the term as it is used by Aristotle and its history, it is necessary to start by looking closely at the Greek verb κατηγορεῖν, which in Greek logic, from Aristotle onwards, actually means "to predicate", in a logical and syntactic frame. From that is derived the noun κατηγορία, meaning "predicament". In Aristotle's wording (directly translated): "For everything that is expressed without being tied together (namely, in a proposition) means or expresses (σημαίνει) one of the following"—and then follows the list of categories: being or existence (οὐσία) or how much (ποσόν) or what kind (ποιόν), related to what (πρός τι), where (ποῦ) or when (ποτέ) or to lie (κεῖσθαι), to have or to be in a state (ἔχειν), to do (ποιεῖν) or to be affected (πάσχειν). A seemingly more sophisticated, nominally expressed translation has often been used in modern languages, once it was launched in Latin terminology, namely, substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, condition, active and passive form of action. But observing the actual means of expression in Greek, it may be questioned whether such terminological decisions really are adequate. The basic category, "the being", οὐσία, is more often expressed by Aristotle by a clause: "something (that) is" (τί ἐστι). The other categories are in the same text expressed either as "how" the meaning of words may be, i.e. in the forms of adjectives and adverbs, or as "action", i.e. as verbs. It is rather conspiciuous that actually none of them is expressed by a noun in Greek. Already on this formal basis, any close resemblance to an Indian concept of categories may be disputed.

By the list of "categories", everything is encompassed, but—in Aristotle's own words—only in the sense that every subject in a sentence must be predicated as having the meaning of one of these categories. Accordingly the "category" is a description of the subject in a sentence, but it does not involve any truth-value until it is expressed in a sentence. Aristotle does not make any effort to ensure the reality of the categories, but instead, it has been remarked, they actually seem to coincide with his idea of parts of speech, later inherited by Western grammar. However, this thesis must be evaluated by a closer, internal discussion of Aristotle's own analysis of parts of speech in the text entitled *Peri poietikes*.

When the concept of κατηγορία recurs in the writings of Aristotle, he nowhere defines the entities of the world in terms of categories, though he always gives a special place to οὐσία, "being" or, maybe, "substance". His special interest is in consistently connecting the syntax, i.e. the logical relation between the words in a sentence, with semantics, just aiming at finding out the connection between the syntax and the parts of speech, a concern that is always recurring in any grammar, whether it is based on logic or on pragmatics.

Other aspects of the Aristotelian categories are treated in his other texts, but always his concern is to show, firstly, what may be said about something and, secondly, on all occasions also what may be said to be true.

In the second most important text, *Topica*, the concept seems to come closer to an interpretation as some kind of "entities", when he says that for each one of them may be predicated what is individual (ὅρος), special (συμβεβηκός), general (γένος) or accidental (ἴδιον). Anything expressed must dwell in one of the categories and together they cover everything. In other passages (*Physics* and *Metaphysics*), the discussion really concerns τὸ ὄν, but here he treats the question of which movements and changes may be inherent in certain of the categories. In one special case (*Ni-*

comachean Ethics), the concept of "the good" (τὸ ἀγαθόν) is tested against the categories, with the conclusion that this is not something independent, since it may be expressed by all the categories. Furthermore, we are are told in all passages that there is an obvious distinction between οὐσία and the other themes, since there is identity with the subject when this is the subject of any predicate; the other categories are in this respect accidental (*Posterior Analytics*). Thus, the overall definition of the categories is always bound to the analysis of the structure and the meaning of sentences and they are not treated as pragmatically defined.

The idea of categories was a main topic of European intellectual discourse during the Middle Ages, based on Aristotle. In the handbooks of the scholastics as well as in the school grammars the categories were simplified by notional definitions and actually given a touch of metaphysics, as if they were part of a real being. One of the scholastics' main concerns was with ontological and epistemological issues. But it was the categories in the Aristotelian sense that much later were rephrased in a vigorous way by I. Kant in his idealistic epistemology. Kant defined the categories, still further away from being entities, rather as inherent forms of thought and knowledge, given *a priori*, such as unity and diversity, negation, causality, reality and others, up to a decided number of 12 arranged in systematic order.

Other Western philosophers, for instance, Schopenhauer and Mill, have used the expression also in a methodological way. The tradition from Aristotle, however, seems to turn up in philosophical discourse in the fact that the categories are constantly means of defining semantic items by language, and in later times, there is a certain connection with metaphysics. But the categories continued to express a special aspect of reality, which was based on sheer human experience of the processes of mind. Thus, anyhow, they came to form part of epistemology, whatever was the world which was to be known by means of the categories. Western philosophy has in fact always been bound to define any category by its capacity to be used in an assertion, judged as true or false, just as by Aristotle. There is actually a difference in the development of the concept in the sense that the categories of Aristotle tell about the meaning, whereas Kant's categories, for instance, define both the meaning and the knowledge, though given in a human world.

Now, what about the Indian way? The term *padārtha* in Vaiśeṣika and other systems of thinking has almost unanimously been translated in Western languages by the word "categories". A still more suggestive word, used in imitation of Aristotle, is sometimes found, viz. "predicaments", though it is quite clear that Vaiśeṣika is not a philosophy of language. Here we should mainly try to find out the difference between Aristotle and Vaiśeṣika. In order to recognize what has been common knowledge, we have to keep to schoolbooks, advanced ones of course. The definitions of *padārtha* in the logical systems will thus be represented here mainly by the instructive text by Śivāditya entitled *Saptapadārthī*. Initially, in this text, *padārtha* is defined by a *sūtra* saying that *pramitiviṣayaḥ padārthaḥ*, they are definitely objects of knowledge. Later on in the text (*sūtra* 140)—as elsewhere—the knowable things are said to be *tattva*, and if there is no reality, that is, *atattva*, there is no knowledge. The seven *padārtha*s are counted (*dravya, guṇa, karma, sāmānya, viśeṣa, samavāya,* and *abhāva*—the last occurring as an addition to the original list of six *padārtha*s in

Kaṇada's *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* 1.1.4, as well as in the bhāṣya by Praśastapāda) and they are subsequently defined by enumeration. It may be said of these *padārthas* that they correspond to what is seen by the outer or the inner eye as *tattva*, as items in the world, in fact in a realistic kind of world. Looking at them in this way, it is easy to understand the combinations of what we would usually distinguish as abstract and concrete notions or as wholes and as analysed things. With reference to the merging of Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika, it must be pointed out that also the original, enumerated items in Nyāya, which in translations are so often called "categories", are in fact in Sanskrit called *tattva* and not *padārtha*. The evidenced combination of the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika concepts is rendered in various ways by the schoolbooks, for example, such surveys as *Tarkasaṁgraha* and *Tarkabhāṣa*. In general, the original Nyāya concepts, the *tattvas*, seem to have a more or less logical or even a rather methodological aim in the sense of *pramāṇa*, while the Vaiśeṣika *padārtha* occur in most instances as *prameya*. Annambhaṭṭa in *Tarkasaṁgraha* treats initially the methods of analysis and discusses the *padārthas* as part of the *prameyas*, together with certain of the Nyāya *tattvas*. The rephrasing commentaries here just mention the *padārtha* as *artha*. Keśava Miśra in *Tarkabhāṣa*, on the other hand, directly subordinates *padārtha* to the Nyāya *tattva*, just as part of the *prameya*. It is anyhow quite clear that the idea of *padārtha* is one, and just one, part of the epistemology of the combined Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika system. The issue should be further discussed when we come to the essential question of how to find a clue to the concept of *tattva* and perhaps to the idea of reality. Also the soteriological aspects of another notion used in this connection might be discussed, namely *jñāna*, which seems to be very important in the final system.

It may additionally be remarked that for Sāṁkhya the enumeration of the entities of the world occurs under the heading of *tattva*, which number 25 in the most authoritative texts, while *padārtha* is used as a term only in a rather special way. In *Sāṁkhyakārikā* 61, there is a description of the totality of the world, commented upon as threefold, namely, *vyaktāvyaktapuruṣa* — the manifest, the unmanifested and the *puruṣa*. This may be an indication that a basic meaning of *prameya* has also penetrated here. Apparently the same applies also to the Vedānta, where the *padārthas* are known as *cit* and *acit*.

But by what are the *padārtha* and *tattva* ascertained in Nyāya–Vaiśeṣika? According to *Tarkabhāṣa*, they may be right and real (*sat*) when pointed out in an intellectual process, even in a logical treatment; but it never occurs in this system of thought that they have to be truly or falsely told in a sentence, as is the claim of Aristotle. Instead they are aiming at a superior reality, a *brahman* or a *brahman* simile.

It is obviously tempting to compare, approximately as Foucher did in his commentary on the translation of *Tarkasaṁgraha*, between Aristotle and Vaiśeṣika, as follows:

οὐσία/*dravya*

ποσόν, ποιόν, ποιόν/*guṇa* (actually including the sub-items *saṁkhyā* and *parimāṇa* for ποσόν and *saṁyoga* for πρός τι)

κεῖσθαι, ἔχειν, ποιεῖν, πάσχειν/*karma*

But the "where" (ποῦ) and the "when" (ποτέ) do not appear on the same level in

the Indian system; the Indian ideas of space and time are located as sub-items to *dravya*.

Of the Indian concepts, which seem to be missing in the Greek categories, two or three may be found to be compatible with some other notions, actually treated by Aristotle, even in the same connection, but they are sorted out as inherent in all the categories. Actually, genus (γένος), species (συμβεβηκός) and "property" (ἴδιον) may be taken as possible counterparts to *sāmānya*, *viśeṣa* and *samavāya*. Outside any comparison, there is the Aristotelian ὅρος, ὁρισμός, "limitation/definition", which may be relevant only in a system of class logic; on the Indian side, the concept of *abhāva* has no Greek counterpart, and it is by no means the same as "false" in opposition to "true". The idea of denial is in Indian thought included in reality and this is also probably only meaningful in an Indian thought–system, where symmetry is essential and both what is and what is not can be regarded as objects of knowledge.

In a coming to the end of the comparison, however, it must be stated that the aim makes the essential difference. A formal observation is that the Aristotelian categories since they are expressed by verbs and adverbs, are all together actional, occasional and process–expressing; the Indian ideas, on the other hand, are in fact conceived of as static and as entities. Along with this, we are dealing with the use of words to handle the language and its sentences, on the one hand, and to make an inventory of reality, on the other. The similarities are more or less occasional, but it would not be surprising if at least the first and very basic resemblances in terms of substance, qualities and action may have something to do with language universals, marked in a similar way in the two languages Greek and Sanskrit.

I may add only a short note on the concept of *padārtha*, as used in the grammatical literature. Its meaning in this occurrence is not very far from what is meant by the term in Vaiśeṣika–philosopy. Strictly speaking, the word means "the thing, or the purpose of the word, the *pada*". This opens up a discussion on the triadic relation of word, reference and thing in Western linguistics. One basic idea must be borne in mind, namely that in Indian epistemology and psychology the perception of the thing is closely bound to the object, more than to the subject as it is in Western thought. As regards the word *padārtha* in linguistic speculation, it seems likely that both the thing and the idea about it in the perceiving mind is included in the word *artha*. The word, *pada*, or even better the "sound" of the word, *śabda*, may rather be described as the mere symbol, in the sense of an *upacāra,* of the *artha*. Once again, we may compare this with the Greek thinking and its expressions. The original basis of the Western analysis on this point is the Greek λόγος, which in itself seems to bear both the spoken word (ῥῆμα, ἔπος) and also the meaning of the word. But the real object, the πρᾶγμα, belonging to the sphere of action in the world, is expressed by quite different terms. It is not really compatible with *artha*, which comprises both the thing and the conception of the thing referred to; there may certainly be some kind of connection with another meaning of *artha* (object or intention).

In Indian grammar and linguistic philosophy it is thus possible to observe a parallelism between the use of the word *padārtha* in grammar and in Vaiśeṣika–philosophy: there is a thing, a reality, and it is knowable, in the case of grammar by the linguistic sign.

It may also be noted as significant that the *padārtha* in grammatical tradition, going back to Yāska, may just as well be a *bhāva* as a *sattva*; the noun is perceived as central and not the verbal action, as by Aristotle.

An analysis of Aristotle's categories and the *padārthas* displays differences and seems to contribute to another and very essential question, namely, whether we may actually set the same or different boundaries between the realm of metaphysics and epistemology in the traditions of philosophical thought in India and in the West.

To conclude: the categories, as an idea in Western thought, are a matter of language, logic and semantics, developing to form part of a kind of epistemology in which the means of knowledge are treated independently from the objects of knowledge. It is only in the common and more popular use of the term that it seems to suggest a metaphysical meaning. In Indian thinking, on the other hand, the *padārthas* were metaphysical notions from the beginning, but their use came to be integrated as part of another kind of epistemology, in which the concern is the objects of knowledge, as well as the means of knowledge.

Even though Aristotle, Kant, etc., used the word "categories" in a framework of logic and epistemological method, it must be admitted that the more or less popular use of the word in the Western languages has come to designate not abstract and merely linguistic or logical but concrete notions and the term has come to denote at least certain aspects of reality. We then come much closer to the idea of *padārtha* in the Indian texts. But my contention is that we are not entitled to use the word "categories" as a translation of either *padārtha*, *tattva* or *prameya* or, as sometimes happens, even *dharma*, if we do not at least know about the big differences in the original settings.

I am not even sure whether I should plead for the use of a more neutral translation, such as "entities", for *padārthas* instead. This term also reminds us via Latin about the expression τὸ ὄν in Greek, suggesting a world of true realities. In fact, it is formed just like the Sanskrit word *astitva*, and is very similar in meaning. It would also be rather suitable, because one of the characteristics of *padārtha*, according to Nyāya, is, in fact, *astitva*, beside *jñeyatva* and *abhidheyatva*—concepts which have been the main topic of this lecture.

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